

pathologists and biophysicists, who by virtue of their varied disciplines, have been able to bring a refreshing new light to the problems of radiobiology which appear to bear some parallel to the changes seen after normal ageing.

For the reviewer the most fascinating chapter in the book was that dealing with possible mechanisms of senescence. In this chapter Dr. Comfort skillfully leads us to the immunological mechanisms postulated by Burnett who suggests that the organism might face a steady increase in autoimmune reactions with the passage of time; Dr. Comfort points out that this is in a sense a return to the original concept of Metchnikoff who seventy years earlier predicted that the same basic cellular mechanism would prove to be morphogenetic in the embryo, defensive in the adult and destructive at the end of the life span. The possibility of humoral factors being involved are also discussed and the theory that a humoral factor leads ultimately to the modification of cells which in turn causes misidentification and subsequently provokes an immune response. The arguments in favour and against these various hypotheses are skillfully presented in a way that makes exciting reading.

Ageing effects on collagen are reviewed, ranging from the early concepts of progressive dehydration as postulated by Ruzicka in 1924 to the modern views on ageing induced by cross linking in cell constituents and changes in associated polysulphates as indicated by Gross in 1962.

This book is recommended not only to those biologists concerned with ageing, but also to workers in any biological field as a useful reference work and most stimulating reading.

D. A. WILLOUGHBY

INDIA

Thomas, P. *Indian Women through the Ages: A historical survey of the position of women and the institutions of marriage and family in India from remote antiquity to the present day.* London, 1964. Asia Publishing House. Pp. x + 392. Price 45s.

THIS CURIOUS BOOK by Paul Thomas (said on the blurb to have started as a school teacher, then to have worked on Indian Railways and the Bombay Port Trust) traces the social history of women in India from the legendary days of the

Indus Valley Civilization till to-day. Many myths and stories are quoted, some fascinating, others repellent, a few touching; but there is no bibliography, and the footnote references are not dated.

The theme is a condemnation of the abject dependence of women on men throughout India's long history. The author is on the side of the ladies, and laments the "misery and iniquity" of Indo-Aryan sacramental marriage, and the tyranny of husbands—"the patent vice of patriarchal societies". He lauds the freedom of the Nayar women of Kerala (S.W. India), a matriarchal society where there has been no Purdah, child-marriage or Sati (Suttee—widow burning). These institutions, defined as "refined vices of the upper classes", are traced historically, and some gruesome details are given. The part played by the British in abolishing the last two is sympathetically described, together with the work of enlightened Hindu leaders.

Only the last twenty-five pages deal with the great advances made during this century. The need for birth control is pointed up in an undocumented quotation from Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, illustrating the new attitude towards women:

Motherhood . . . must be a conscious task undertaken with joy . . . and regulated according to the emotional urge and physical capacity of the woman . . . Birth control is necessary for reasons of health, eugenics, social and economic considerations. To put forth the plea that a useful and necessary weapon should not be brought into public use simply because it may be abused, is absurd . . . One may as well advocate the stopping of the manufacture of matches simply because we can set anything on fire with a match.

Gandhi, on the other hand, took the view that the only permissible form of population control was abstention, and is quoted as saying that birth control must lead to "hideous promiscuity". Mr. Thomas thinks, hopefully, that resistance to the Government's family planning programme has been overcome, but he does not comment on the pressing need to raise the *per capita* income if the programme is to succeed.

This book cannot be called scholarly, but it is *sympathique*, and it contains bits of good writing ("Old Brahminism . . . spread its painless tentacles [among the Lingayats] . . . and Caste, that

despair of all reformers in India . . . reasserted itself.”). Where facts are stated, they seem to be correct. There is an index, but it does not mention vital subjects such as education, literacy and caste, which are dealt with in the text. The grammar is often quaint, the proof reading poor, and the binding weak. There are no maps, date-tables or illustrations which would greatly increase its interest for Western readers, and which one expects in a book costing 45s. One is left with a feeling of affection mingled with awe and pity, both for the still partially caste-bound upper and middle classes, and for the vast millions of rural and aboriginal India. And one marvels that it is in to-day's India that women have reached higher administrative and diplomatic posts than in any other country.

B. S. BOSANQUET

POPULATION

Szabady, Egon (Editor). *Bevetés a Demográfia (Primer of Demography)*. A Symposium. Budapest, 1964. Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Pp. 610. Price not stated.

THE *Society* HAS received, from the Secretary of the Academy's Demographic Committee, a copy of this work in Hungarian and also a translation into English of the Preface and List of Contents. The Preface, which is quite brief, draws attention to past Hungarian population literature and to a few of the standard books in other languages but expresses some concern at the fact that no single one of these works is fully comprehensive. It remarks that “it is a characteristic feature of the lack of overall and systematic demographic works that frequently, at great universities . . . demography is not taught from a particular textbook but compilations are made from different chapters of fifteen to twenty textbooks.” The attempt has therefore been made to put together all the essential information in one place. Although many authors have been called upon to write the various chapters, the whole is designed as a carefully integrated structure.

Few readers of the REVIEW will be unaware of the importance to students of appreciating different authors' points of view in separate publications, and of the practical disadvantages

of a heavy tome. The premises upon which this book has been founded are therefore open to question; they suggest an ideological limitation of scope if not indeed a bias. Nevertheless, it is possible from the list of contents to form only a very tentative idea of the style and matter of the text. The chapters and sections appear to deal successively with such subjects as population by area, age-composition, literacy, mother tongue, marriages, households and mortality—suggesting a thorough, if diffuse, step-by-step analysis. The sub-headings indicate a practical approach and give little sign of political dogma.

The Preface is modest enough to suggest that the work is of a general “introductory” nature for the interest of specialists in related fields rather than a complete guide for demographic students. On this basis, apart perhaps from being too long, the book may well serve a very useful function in Hungary and in any other countries into whose languages it becomes translated in full.

P. R. C.

Fabre-Luce, Alfred. *Men or Insects? A Study of Population Problems*. London, 1964. Hutchinson. Pp. 155. Price 21s.

WHETHER IT IS strictly accurate for this book to be described as a study is perhaps a little debatable but it is certainly a highly entertaining and lively review of the population problem and also of many of the associated problems.

As the title indicates, the author's chief anxiety is whether mankind is heading for the ant-hill existence or whether personality and freedom will triumph in the end, but the charm of the book is the freshness of the approach and the dry and humorous angles from which old problems are viewed. Moreover the author—a Frenchman—draws on a wealth of accumulated facts in support of his statements and the work is thus a valuable addition to any bookshelf. It would, however, be much improved by the addition of an index.

Naiveté in both scientist and laity comes in for rough handling and “technocratic credulity” has “in our time taken the place of simple religion.” And yet, even after making allowances for difficulties of translation, some words are